

certainly do is outlay our experiences for others to consider.

We also are very appreciative of the width of support that has been put behind the economic investment conference by the President and by Paula Dobriansky as Ambassador. And we're very hopeful in the time ahead. And, in fact, I think we're confident that jobs, much needed jobs, will flow from that. And I think providing good jobs, a decent standard of living, facing up to the economic difficulties that are—people have to endure is a very important part of the workload which Peter and I, as First and Deputy First Minister, need to take forward in the time ahead.

President Bush. Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:14 p.m. at Stormont Castle. In his remarks, Deputy First Minister McGuinness referred to former Senator George J. Mitchell; former Special Envoys for Northern Ireland Richard N. Haass and Mitchell B. Reiss; and Ambassador Paula J. Dobriansky, the President's Special Envoy to Northern Ireland.

Remarks Following a Briefing on Flooding in the Midwest

June 17, 2008

I've just assembled my—many people in my domestic policy team to discuss the current flooding in the Midwest. First, our hearts and thoughts go to those who lost life. And of course, we're concerned about those whose—who've lost their homes or lost their businesses.

I've been briefed by Secretary Chertoff and Secretary Schafer and Director Paulison about the response. First task at hand is to deal with the flood waters, to anticipate where the flooding may next occur, and to work with the State and local authorities to deal with the response.

For example, in the case of Iowa, one of the issues was the need for fresh drinking water—or drinking water, and so Director Paulison informed me that we've provided about 2 million liters of drinking water. When I was overseas, I spoke to the Governor, and he said, "Listen, I—the Federal—we need Federal help on drinking water."

So I sent the word to David, and he responded well.

My only point to you is, is that we're in constant contact with people on the ground to help make sure that we save lives. Now that the water is beginning to recede, the question is, how do we help with the recovery? And Secretary Chertoff briefed me on plans, particularly when it comes to housing. A lot of people are going to be wondering, is there short-term help for housing? And there is, and we'll provide that help.

And secondly, what's going to happen in the long term to the homes? And so Michael's going to set up a housing task force, similar to the kind we set up in California for the wildfires, to work with State and local authorities to have an orderly strategy to help people get back in their homes.

I fully understand people are upset when they lose their home. A person's home is their most valued possession. And we want to work with State and local folks to have a clear strategy to help people find—get back into a place they—that—where they can live.

Secondly, we're worried about farmers and ranchers. The country that's being affected by these floods has got a lot of farm country, a lot of people raising livestock. And the Secretary of Agriculture has briefed me on the conditions—and we're still assessing how widespread the damage is on the farmlands—and assures me that his team's in place to help farmers and ranchers with the Federal aid available.

And finally, Director Nussle's here from the Budget Office. We've got what we called a Disaster Relief Fund. There's enough money in that fund to take care of this disaster, but what we're concerned about is future disasters this year. And therefore, we're going to work with the Congress—Jim Nussle is going to go up to work with Congress to get enough money in the upcoming supplemental to make sure that fund is—has got enough money to deal with a potential disaster—another disaster this year.

Congress doesn't need to worry about working with the White House on this, because we think the supplemental is the way to go. What they do need to worry about is making sure that there is enough, but not

too much, money in the fund, so we can say we have done our job.

I want to thank the members of my administration for working hard on this issue. I want to thank the Governors in the affected States for being so compassionate in caring for their citizens. I want to thank the folks at the local level for loving a neighbor like they'd like to be loved themselves.

This Thursday, I'm going to take our team down there to meet with the folks in Iowa. And I, unfortunately, have been to too many disasters as President. But one thing I've always learned is that the American citizen can overcome these disasters. And life, while it may seem dim at this point in time, can always be better because of the resiliency and care of our citizens.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:21 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Agriculture Edward T. Schafer; R. David Paulison, Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency; Gov. Chet Culver of Iowa; and James A. Nussle, Director, Office of Management and Budget.

Remarks Following a Briefing on the Security Situation in Afghanistan

June 17, 2008

The President. It's been my privilege to have served with two really fine Americans, General Dan McNeill and Maureen McNeill. I've gotten to know the General well. He's a tough, no-nonsense patriot who was our commander in Afghanistan. I want to thank you very much for the briefing you just gave me about the issues that we face, your optimism about success.

I was telling the Secretary and the General, I just—about my trip to Europe, where I was pleased with the strong commitments of our allies to helping us succeed in Afghanistan. They know that what happens in Afghanistan matters to their own internal security.

They fully understand as well that helping young girls go to school and helping moms raise their babies in a—you know, in a better environment, helping rebuild this society

after years of tyranny is in all our interests. And it's also a moral duty we have.

And so I'm pleased, Mr. Secretary, that your hard work in working with the allies is paying off.

And, General, I know you're moving on, but the country thanks you for what you did. The world is better off because of your service. I'm proud to have you here.

Gen. Dan K. McNeill. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Yes, sir. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:44 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. Dan K. McNeill, USA, former Commander, NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan, and his wife, Maureen; and Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates.

Remarks at a Reception for Black Music Month

June 17, 2008

Thanks for coming. Please be seated. Thank you. Welcome to the White House. I really appreciate you coming to celebrate Black Music Month. Music has been a part of this house since its beginning. Some of our Presidents themselves were skilled musicians. Some were not. [Laughter] As a matter of fact, after the Temptations came here a couple of months ago, I was so inspired that I thought I would take up singing. [Laughter] Laura said, "You might just stick with practicing your speaking." [Laughter] So thanks for giving me a chance to do it today. And thanks for coming. We're going to have a pretty special day here at the White House.

I want to thank my friend Alphonso Jackson and Marcia. It's good to see you. Appreciate you being here.

Rod Paige, former Secretary of the Education, celebrating his 75th birthday today. Yes. You're looking good, Rodney.

Dr. Dorothy Height—honored you're here, Dr. Height. Proud to be with you. Roslyn Brock, vice chairman of the NAACP—Roslyn—yes, good to see you, Roslyn. Thanks for coming. Marc Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League—proud to have you here, Marc, thanks for coming.